



# A Study of Strategic Human Resource Management : Some Cases at Vietnamese Companies in Vietnam (山村睦夫名誉教授追悼号)

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journal or publication title	Wako Keizai
volume	50
number	2
page range	23-33
year	2018-02
URL	<a href="http://id.nii.ac.jp/1073/00004732/">http://id.nii.ac.jp/1073/00004732/</a>

# A Study of Strategic Human Resource Management

-Some Cases at Vietnamese Companies in Vietnam-

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## [Abstract]

Strategic human resource management plays a very important role in any organization. Implementation of strategic human resource management can help an organization achieve the highest levels of performance, bring success to the organization and stabilize the best talents for a long period of time. This management is likely to vary from company to company. In order to consider about activities of strategic human resource management, short interviews were conducted at five Vietnamese companies in Ho Chi Minh City. This paper introduced briefly the interview survey's content and thereby we can understand about current activities of strategic human resource management in Vietnamese companies. In addition, based on actual management situation at Vietnamese companies in Vietnam, we propose four hypotheses as future subject.

## [Keywords]

Strategic human resource management, training, retention, Vietnamese companies

## 1. Introduction

Human resource is always considered as an organization's most important asset and one of the determinants of the survival of that organization. Nowadays traditional human resource management seems to have been replaced by a strategic management approach in many organizations. A large number of studies argue that it is necessary to carry out human resource management in tandem with business strategy (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003). Hence, it can be said that strategic human resource management plays an extremely important role for development and should be promoted in any organiza-

tion.

To attract talented staffs to work for their organization, many directors, managers execute strategies of human resource management. However, not only the strategic planning of recruitment is always prioritized, but the strategies to stabilize key strategic human resources and encourage them to work for a long period of time with the organization also become essential in any organization.

In the Japanese market, lifetime employment and seniority-based system are commonly known as the policies making staffs commit for a long time in an organization. But in other areas, where the form of employment is carried out under various forms of contracts, which

strategies do employers have to develop and how are their staffs working in organization? Is training to staffs paid attention in organization? Are strategic human resource management practices applied in organization? And who plays an important role in personnel management?

With purpose to explore above issues or in other words, so as to consider issues of strategic human resource management in business organizations, we conducted a survey at five companies in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. This paper is a brief summary of interviews done with directors, managers, deputy managers of Vietnamese companies. Through this survey we can understand more about current activities about strategic human resource management in Vietnam and propose some hypotheses concerning strategic human resource management for Vietnamese companies in Vietnam.

## 2. Content of the survey

As mentioned above, the survey was conducted at five Vietnamese companies in Ho Chi Minh City: Prudential Vietnam Co., Ltd.; Vinako Forwarding Co., Ltd.; T&A Logistics Co., Ltd., Vietfracht Co., Ltd.; Synova Co., Ltd. Each of them was investigated its brief profiles, strategic human resource management, etc.

### 2.1. Survey at Prudential Vietnam Co., Ltd.

#### 2.1.1 Brief profile of Prudential Vietnam Co., Ltd.

Prudential Vietnam Co., Ltd. was established in 2007 and is one member of Prudential Group. It is one of the leading companies in life insurance for Vietnamese people with hundreds of customer service centers, branch offices and agent offices throughout Vietnam. In addition to the insurance sector, it also provides financial

solutions to meet various needs of customers in Vietnam. Prudential group has a large number of employees in different offices and Prudential Vietnam Co. Ltd.'s employee number is 300 people<sup>1)</sup>.

For many years, it has contributed many positive outcomes for social activities in Vietnam and achieved numerous awards such as the Certificate of Merit value for CSR Activities by Prime Minister, Top 100 best products for children and family, Labor Medal Award, etc.

#### 2.1.2 Concerns about strategic human resource management

With a large number of talented staffs having responsibility, it is willing to provide the best quality services to customers. It has always focused on training issues for its staffs to enhance skills needed to perform their job.

Typically, it often operates Orientation Training for new employees within two months. This training content includes company policies, company profiles, security, contact, technical skills, sources, etc. to help staffs understand more about the company, obtain important knowledge to be able to work effectively and understand their responsibilities and roles in organization.

With the big size and clear policies, it has received qualified employees and talents. Its staffs work stably over many years and it had a low rate of employee turnover last year. According to its human resource manager, it always focuses on two important factors in order to attract and retain staffs. They are considered as necessary and sufficient elements. Necessary factors mentioned here include compensation, benefit. Sufficient factors are good working environment and promotion opportunities. Compensation is always considered as one very important factor to ensure life for employees at any place not only in Vietnam. Also, a

good working environment, promotion opportunities, pay increases would be essential to strengthen staffs' motivation and push them to complete their tasks in the best way.

Its retaining talents or employee retention is always known as one of the most important strategies in organization. This issue reflects company's values to customers. Stable human resources bring positive factors for the company. However, its human resource manager also said that staffs' staying for long time in an organization will not bring positive values to the company, especially un-experienced, inefficient or lazy staffs. Therefore, the longer qualified and talented staffs stay organization, the more significant achievements it will obtain.

It also makes plans to set up replacement and promotion clearly for successors. Selection for replacement and promotion are done carefully and cautiously. Management board considers potential staffs in departments, their schedules to receive new job and their abilities. If needed, management board will suggest training plan or ask them to participate in training courses, etc. After learning process, management board will assign tasks and do check their deliverables to ensure accuracy and clarity of required works.

## **2.2. Survey at Vinako Forwarding Co., Ltd.**

### **2.2.1 Brief profile of Vinako Forwarding Co., Ltd.**

Vinako Forwarding Co., Ltd. is a joint venture between Vietnam Airlines Corporation and Konoike Transport Co., Ltd. (Japan). It was established in 1996. For many years, Vinako, it has widened its scope of activities with the large scale at many areas in Vietnam such as Hanoi, Binh Duong Province, Bien Hoa City, etc. Currently, its staff number is 70 peoples. Recently it has been evaluated as one of 20 unit achieving a high profit from 180% to 200%. It

specializes in air and sea freight forwarding, express forwarding services, trucking services, parking services, customs declaration and clearance, door-to-door services, etc.<sup>2)</sup>

### **2.2.2 Concerns about strategic human resource management**

Over many years experienced in logistics industry, it always focuses on trainings for staffs to serve customers efficiently. The trainings are often divided in forms of basic training and advanced training such as dangerous goods etc. to help staffs understand process of operation. Besides, by regularly working with foreign partners and customers, its staffs always promote English communication skills by themselves and it also supports them when needed. In addition, since it has Japanese partners, it is making plan to hold training of Japanese language to staffs next year.

Regarding employee turnover, it has not faced trouble about this issue. Number of staffs is so stable and there is little change in organization. The number of staffs working over 15 years accounts for 20% and the number of ones working over 10 years accounts for 45% of total staffs of company. This data shows that there is a long-term commitment of experienced staffs to organization.

Salary plays a very important role to attract and retain staffs in this company. This factor is considered to account for over 70% of determinants to influence to staffs' staying in organization. However, if working environment with high salaries creates an enormous amount of pressure, staffs do not feel happy to work in organization for long term. Hence, creating a comfortable working environment for all staffs is one of the extremely necessary strategies to retain talents for it. Good working environmental mentioned here is an environment where

bosses and staffs can communicate, share information with each other and staffs can learn by themselves.

Strategic human resource management is always an important task to contribute to development of any company. It is said that stability of staffs or their loyalties to organization reflects the company's value for customers. Therefore, it always considers human resource as the face of company. Talented staffs who commit to organization for a long time will become key factor to its survival and development. This issue forms corporate culture of company as well. It issues regulations on wages such as pay increase based on staffs' seniority, job performance and seriousness of violations in process of their work mainly to retain key human resources and promote staffs' motivation is that it. It often applies pay increase system once every 5 years.

About its human resource, mainly its staffs are Vietnamese. However, due to work characteristic and relations with partners, now it also has presence of two Japanese managers in charge of customer relations and sale dispatched by partners.

Human resource manager we interviewed this time is female. Not only Vinako Forwarding Co., Ltd. but also many companies in Vietnam, human resource managers are usually females. Therefore, when addressing question why female is often in charge of strategic human resource management in Vietnamese companies, we had received answer as follows: Vietnam's economy is not as good as Japan's economy. Overall, in many families husbands cannot handle all, so women need to join the society, works in company to ensure life of family. Moreover, Vietnamese women are always recognized as good ones at housework, social activities and they can stand difficulties so nowadays we can see many women work at position of

human resource manager. Furthermore, due to responsibility, trustworthy sense, spirit of patience, Vietnamese females are suitable for strategic human resource management jobs than males and its female staffs are always valued highly by Japanese partners.

### **2.3. Survey at T&A Logistics Co., Ltd.**

#### **2.3.1 Brief profile of T&A Logistics Co., Ltd.**

T&A Logistics Co., Ltd. was started up in 2003. Its staff number is 10 people. Its main activities are freight forwarding and freight consolidation. Regarding cargo services, it specializes in international and domestic, various commodities. Some noticeable services include consolidation, space arrangement, rate negotiation, door to door delivery, handling, customs clearance, packing and removal, etc.<sup>3)</sup>

#### **2.3.2 Concerns about strategic human resource management**

Like many other companies, T&A Logistics Co. always pays attention to professional training for new staffs. There are not many changes concerning human resources in organization so recently training courses for new employees has not been done frequently. Professional training about policies, customs procedures, etc. will be conducted if there is any change to help staffs handle to their work effectively.

It has launched strategies, good policies to ensure key human resources for a long period of time in organization. According to its director, salary is an essential element to make a staff work well in an organization but it is not understood as one most important factor. Beyond salary, staffs are always assigned important tasks and powers to execute them. Hence, staffs may feel their existence is essential and meaningful for organization. Besides, it is also a friendly working environment like a family.

Here, staffs can exchange their ideas about work, life, etc. together easily and create a good relationship. In addition, it also sets up policies, remuneration systems such as pay increase, periodic health examinations, etc. to improve staffs' motivation at work.

Actually, stability of human resource brings many benefits to organization. It reflects company's values and makes customers feel secure, more reliable when working with any partner for a long term. Over many years, it has planned and executed salary and career promotion to staffs. It emphasizes aspects of job performance, working skills to decide promotion. On the whole, to enhance efficiency in work, it makes plans for staffs so that they can challenge their assigned tasks and delegates authorities and carries out skills training, etc.

There are some people in organization but it has many departments with existence of directors, chief accountants, human resource manager and staffs team. Like statements from other companies, its director also said that in Vietnam, females prefer to be involved with strategic human resource management position because Vietnamese women are considered as painstaking persons. It is said that human resource manager is in charge of an intermediate position and must stand hardships from superior and subordinate. Males probably would not be appropriate and they do not have solid stamina like females. Furthermore, Vietnamese women often listen from other people and understand what they say, what they need so females are suitable to this task. In Vietnam, most positions of strategic human resource management are mainly taken by females. Males also assume this position in a few companies. However, if males keep this position, staffs who work under male manager's control are females.

## **2.4. Survey at Vietfracht Co., Ltd.**

### **2.4.1 Brief profile of Vietfracht Co., Ltd.**

Vietfracht Co., Ltd. is a joint stock company with 70 % private capital and 30% of other shareholders. It has stepped into the business world since 1963. Over 50 years of development and growth, it has got lots of achievements and many awards. It is one of the leading shipping and forwarding companies in Vietnam. Its main services are shipping agency, chartering and ship-broking, forwarding and logistics, trucking and warehousing, shipping, etc. It has one head-office in Hanoi and many branches in various areas for example Quang Ninh, Hai Phong, Da Nang, Dung Quat, Quy Nhon, Ho Chi Minh, Vung Tau. Staff number of each branch is not same. Staff number of branch in Ho Chi Minh City, where we conducted interview, is 55 people<sup>4)</sup>.

### **2.4.2 Concerns about strategic human resource management**

About issues of strategic human resource management, it gives attention to training of professional skills and knowledge to staffs so that they can understand process of work. For example, training course on cargo, shipment being are often held for staffs once every 2 years, etc. Formerly, orientation training was conducted in company, but recently only professional training sessions has been held for staffs since there is no change relating to human resource.

Because of stability of key personnel resource in organization, it always achieves successes and gains trust of partners and customers. One of factors affecting to keeping staffs in organization is that it always creates a friendly working environment for all staffs. In this environment, they can share, help, cooperate together to

make a good job without inconsistencies. In addition to working environment, salary is considered as a very important factor for staffs who want to stay for a long period of time in organization. This factor is said to be essential so as to guarantee staffs' life at high average level so that they are able to contribute their capacities, knowledge, experiences for organization's development. Moreover, so as to improve staffs' abilities, it also delegates decision-making authority to staffs so that they can handle their work freely. By handing over power, staffs can promote their concentration, responsibility, judgment and settlement, etc. by themselves.

It specializes mainly in field of customer service and is a logistics agent for many foreign companies. It has many experienced staffs and they can avoid unexpected errors in the job easily. Retention of these staffs can create many profits, achievements for companies and it can reflect company's value for customers.

Besides working environment and wages factor, it also pays attention to promotion for all staffs. All staffs of company have met necessary capacity for required works. Therefore, it bases on their abilities, working skills, process, dynamics, sensitivities, achievements, etc. to decide appointment and promotion. Promotion is often conducted within department.

According to management board, most many Vietnamese companies' females often assume position of strategic human resource management. In other departments such as sales, marketing, manufacturing, etc., males often handle easier and more appropriate than females. However, regarding human resources department, females are more suitable than males because they have high stamina, endurance. Furthermore, they can manage their time strictly and handle their tasks by themselves. It is said that Vietnamese women can handle work of family

and company well. Hence, they can divide their time for work and family to be able to work in the best way. Moreover, strategic human resource management is known as one of the internal tasks so it does not take much time for females to complete their tasks compared to other works. Once female staffs of strategic human resource management have stress at work, they can solve more easily than males by going shopping, chatting with friends, family, etc.

## **2.5. Survey at Synova Co., Ltd.**

### **2.5.1 Brief profile of Synova Co., Ltd.**

Founded in 2010, Synova Co., Ltd. is one of young information technology companies in Vietnam. It specializes in outsourcing for various customers at home and abroad. Its overseas customers come from Europe, France, Switzerland, Denmark, Australia, the United States, etc. Up to now, it has a total staff up to 60 people with professional teams. It has often received many big-size project concerning Web Development, Mobile Application Development, ERP System Solutions, testing, design, etc. Languages mainly used in programming are English and French<sup>5)</sup>.

### **2.5.2 Concerns about strategic human resource management**

Synova Co., Ltd. is a company specializing in information technology. It has frequently received new projects from customers. To carry out these projects, it requires staffs to update and learn new programming languages frequently. However, one of the weaknesses in Vietnam's information technology market is that there is still a shortage of trainings about the newest technical skills for developers. Due to this reason, there are many cases that companies cannot meet the needs of customers.



Understanding this situation, it often buys training courses by online. Through these courses, staffs can access to the newest technologies, languages intended to meet requirements of projects. These courses are carried out about 12 months and presentation courses are done within 1 month. In general, in order to meet all demands from partners and customers, it always prioritizes technical skill trainings for all staffs and these training courses have been done regularly.

Most there are not many changes relating to human resource in this organization. If there is any change, mainly it happens in position of junior developer. The change mentioned here is that staffs quit and go to another company. Main reason of staff turnover is not in salaries. Staffs often decide to leave company since they want to try out in many different companies. There is no any change in other positions such as senior developers, project managers.

It always considers pay increase and promotion for all staffs as well. Review process of pay increase and new arrangement is often conducted based on clarity of processes, performances, technologies, skills that staffs obtained. Management board relies on elements to evaluate abilities of staffs and to decide whether appoint a promotion or not.

Like many other companies, it also pays great attention to strategies of strategic human resource management so as to manage its staffs and attract them to work in organization for long time. Its director said that staffs committing for a long time will become very important asset for company. If managers or senior developers quit along the way suddenly, it is difficult for company to complete projects. Thus, staffs who have skills, working experiences and long-term commitment with organization through various projects bring credibility to customers

and create more values to company.

Since it has many foreign customers from various countries, it also conducts recruitment of foreign workers to communicate to customers directly and take more projects from these customers. Employment conditions of foreign staffs are primarily based on their volume of projects, language skills, spirit, reaction, etc. Communication language is mainly English and French language. For management, its structure includes CEO, director, deputy director, business department, production department. Foreign staffs are often recruited for positions of business managers and they are assigned to handle large projects. Foreign staffs are ones who are living in Vietnam and they receive good remuneration similar to abroad's wage level.

In this company, staff of human resource department is female. According to its director, the reason female is suitable to department of strategic human resource management is that she can give attention to other people easily than male. In addition, she can be understandable, acceptable and tolerate high work pressure, especially female under 30 years old.

### **3. Theoretical background and hypothesis development**

Above is summary of survey content relating to strategic human resource management issues of five Vietnamese companies that we conducted short interviews with directors, human resource managers in Vietnam. Through this content, we can show some brief conclusions about strategic human resource management of Vietnamese companies and based on some viewpoints from prior studies, we state four hypotheses as follows:

Although Vietnamese companies operate business in different fields, they place a special



emphasis on training for their staffs. Contents of trainings in companies can vary but common goal of these training is that they want their staffs to grasp a big picture view of company, task content, to obtain necessary skills so as to complete task in the best way and meet all requirements from various customers. The training courses can be carried out in various forms for example internal company training, outside training, online training, etc.

Vietnam is known as the country having large and young workforce (Nguyen & Truong, 2007). Currently demand to recruit skilled workers is very high in many companies and skilled workforce graduated from the best universities become more and more. However, after recruitment, the training of more specialized skills to staffs has been considered as one of the critical factors to ensure the quality of input for the development of organization (Nguyen & Truong, 2007). Investment to this training improves skills for staffs, helps them to handle their tasks in the best ways and enhances their performance (Hong et al., 2012). Based on the current situation of Vietnamese companies and the importance of training to staffs in organization mentioned oftenly in some prior studies, we propose hypothesis about training as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Training is positively related to performance.

In addition, many companies have always considered a lot of elements to maintain and attract experienced and talented staffs to work in organization for a long period of time. It is said that there are many factors affecting to attitude of staffs, their abilities, working period in organization. However, at 5 Vietnamese companies that we interviewed, factors such as remuneration, working environment, promotion

opportunities at work are emphasized as critical factors determining stability of staffs in organization.

Human resource has always been considered as a very important factor in many Vietnamese companies (Phung & Toma, 2015). Currently many companies has focused on strategic human resource management practices as the way to attract and ensure personnel for organization development. Although strategic human resource management practices are diverse and can vary in different types of companies in Vietnam (Zhu et al., 2008), generally they have been essential means to enhance sustainability of human resources in organization. In addition, strategic human resource management practices also reflect ownership traits of the company (Le & Truong, 2005).

Strategic human resource management refers to connection of human resource management practices to strategic business process of an organization. Moreover, this combination of strategic management policies together can contribute to performance at the enterprise level rather than being constrained in a range of departments (Huselid, 1995; Wright et al., 2005). Strategic human resource management policies include many elements that human resource managers need to pay attention to such as wages (Anis et al., 2011), organization culture (Shoaib et al., 2009), reward and recognition (Kyndt et al., 2009), opportunity for growth (Gul et al., 2012), human relationship (Basford & Offermann, 2012), etc. The companies that we carried out interview also pay great attention to these factors. They always consider the necessity and sufficiency in order to meet staffs' needs and encourage them to work in the company for a long period of time. Through the current status of Vietnamese companies, we hypothesize as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Strategic human resource management practices positively affect staff retention.

In Vietnam, where there is no lifetime employment, attraction and maintaining key staffs in organization is one of the most extremely difficult issues. However, at 5 companies that we interviewed, they have focused on keeping the talents. Their management board said that talented staffs who have many experiences, commit themselves to organization will create more value for company, perform their job well, bring satisfaction to customers and get credibility from customers.

Overally Vietnamese companies often conclude various employment contracts with employees (Zhu et al., 2008) and apply strategic human resource management practices to retain talents. However, currently in many companies staffs still decide to resign in order to move to the other companies. Thus retention management has become one of the most difficult issues for many companies in Vietnam. If companies in Vietnam apply lifetime employment into their organization, probably they reduce staff turnover. Lifetime employment has been known as one of the important features of Japanese companies. This employment will encourage staffs to invest their time to improvement of skills, experiences, etc. for a long time and create a large number of experienced and loyal staffs (Gilson & Roe, 1999). Based on this view, we hypothesize about employment for Vietnamese companies as follows:

Hypothesis 3: Lifetime employment is positively related on loyalty of staffs.

To manage business activities of organization, most Vietnamese companies always set up management structure clearly. Especially, in depart-

ment of strategic human resource management of many companies, females are often in charge of manager position. Understanding responsibilities of tasks, arranging time between work and family a reasonably, having patience and endurance are main factors help females fulfill strategic human resource management.

Strategic human resource management department plays an important role in management of personnel in any organization (Alfes et al., 2010). In particular, existence of human resource manager becomes indispensable for the growth of the organization. Human resource manager is the one having experiences in recruitment, selection, training, and implementation of strategies, strategic human resource management practices to attract, ensure and develop human resources for the organization. Also, human resource manager is seen as one interacts with and manage many staffs in different departments (Morton & Joynt, 2006: p. 3). Hence, human resource manager can understand the needs of other departments and be able to make plan of recruitment, management, training, etc. in the most appropriate way.

Because of the importance and characteristics of management, persons have many experiences in strategic human resource management are often appointed human resource manager regardless of sex. However, many Vietnamese companies express that female is suitable to position of human resource manager. This viewpoint can be mentioned in companies we conducted interviews. It is said that female often cares about others more than male. Moreover, she can withstand a lot of pressure, adjust work-family balance and execute management strategies flexibly. Based on this judgment, we hypothesize about management role for Vietnamese companies as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Female manager manages per-

sonnel better than male manager.

#### 4. Directions for future research

Through above interview content, we can get a brief glimpse of activities of strategic human resource management of Vietnamese companies in Vietnam such as training activities, factors to attract and retain staffs, object take a key role in human resource management in organization. Besides, after considering actual situations of Vietnamese companies and some viewpoints from prior studies, we propose four hypotheses concerning strategic human resource management for Vietnamese companies. Based on these hypotheses, in future we will perform an experimental study in order to learn more about the characteristics of human resource management at Vietnamese companies in Vietnam. In addition, we also do study about strategic human resource management at foreign companies in Vietnam for example Japanese companies, American companies, etc. Furthermore, based on these study results, we will carry out comparison about personnel of Vietnamese companies and foreign companies in Vietnam as well.

#### Acknowledgments:

This survey was conducted in five companies in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. We wish to thank directors, managers of these companies for their answers and ideas for the survey.

#### [Note]

- 1) The interview was carried out on March 28th, 2016. Mrs. Tran Thi Ngoc Nhung, Head of Human Resources, helps us answer for this interview.
- 2) The interview was carried out on March 28th, 2016. Mrs. Nguyen Thi Thien An, Manager of Admin. & Personnel, helps us answer for this interview.
- 3) The interview was carried out on March 28th, 2016. Mr. Trieu Vu Duong, Managing Director, helps us answer for

this interview.

- 4) The interview was carried out on March 28th, 2016. Mrs. Nguyen Dao Khanh Lien, Deputy Manager of Forwarding Dept., helps us answer for this interview.
- 5) The interview was carried out on March 28th, 2016. Mr. Viet Tung Hoang, General Director, helps us answer for this interview.

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- [www.vietfracht.com.vn](http://www.vietfracht.com.vn)
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(Received Nov. 15, 2017)  
(Accepted Jan. 24, 2018)